

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination FormSee instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

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date entered

## 1. Name

historic The Commonwealth Club Historic District

and/or common N/A

## 2. Location

Bounded roughly by the rear property lines of 400-500 West Franklin St. on  
street & number the N and by the rear property lines of 319-415 West N/A not for publication  
Franklin St. on the S.

city, town Richmond N/A vicinity of

state Virginia code 51 county (in city) code 760

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name 319-321 West Franklin Street- Foster and Gayle Partnership See cont. page #1  
for other properties

street &amp; number 319 West Franklin Street

city, town Richmond vicinity of N/A state Virginia 23220

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Richmond City Hall

street &amp; number 900 East Broad Street

city, town Richmond state Virginia

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Downtown Richmond Survey (127-373) has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ nodate June 22, 1981 ☐ federal ☒ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

city, town Richmond state Virginia 23219

## 7. Description

### Condition

☐ excellent  
☒ good  
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated  
☐ ruins  
☐ unexposed

### Check one

☐ unaltered  
☒ altered

### Check one

☒ original site  
☒ moved date N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

### Summary

The 400 Block of West Franklin Street contains a series of impressive late 19th-century and early 20th-century townhouses as well as the Commonwealth Club, a building of architectural significance built to house Richmond's prestigious gentleman's club. Located on the western edge of downtown, the block forms a link between the earlier 19th-century townhouses to the east and the 20th-century neighborhoods of Belvidere Street and Monroe Park. The visual effect of the block is of a consistent row of turn-of-the-century residences in brick, brownstone, and terra cotta. The general dark tone and the fine craftsmanship of the block well express the aesthetic preferences of upper-class Richmonders in the decades preceding World War I.

### Detailed Description

Franklin Street was established as a desirable residential location for well-to-do Richmonders in the first decade of the 19th century. Earliest development was of large houses on large lots providing a suburban or country aspect. As the 19th century progressed and Richmond expanded, the street was redeveloped with townhouses. The redevelopment of the street started at Capitol Square and proceeded to the west.

This tide of redevelopment reached the 400 block of West Franklin Street in the 1880's and continued through the following decade. At that time the upper-class character of the street became more pronounced, it was described as Richmond's "Fifth Avenue," and the new houses erected on the street were referred to in guidebooks of the period as being "palatial."

As is the case elsewhere on Franklin Street, the houses in the 400 block were built by individual families, not as part of a development. Only one double house is on the block; all others are individually designed and built. There is considerable stylistic range, with dwellings in the Italianate, Romanesque, Colonial Revival and Classical styles. The consistency in materials and scale provides a unity in appearance.

The most significant building in the group is the Commonwealth Club, designed by the noted New York firm, Carrere & Hastings. The design is a free interpretation of the Colonial, an early example of the Colonial Revival. The facade is unusually composed, the entrance pavilion is flanked by identical wings, but the roof and a large circular bay are asymmetrical. This free composition is more directly related to the earlier Shingle Style than to the later more tame Colonial Revival. The materials and colors of the club, red brick, red-orange terra cotta, and brownstone, relate it to the Romanesque Style of the 1880's.

The Club sits well back from the street in a lawn, thus giving it a more spacious look than is found elsewhere on the street. All of the other buildings on this block are distinctly urban in character. Except for the house at 406 West Franklin Street, all the others shared a common pallet of materials and colors. Brownstone, brick, granite, and terra cotta provide unifying elements on this otherwise stylistically diverse block. Several houses have been painted in pale colors, and the loss of the original color scheme is the only major change other than the demolition of a corner house in the later 1970's.

The houses were all beautifully crafted and contain fine examples of ornamental glass, iron and terra-cotta work, as well as architectural sculpture in brownstone. The aesthetic preferences of the late 19th century demanded good craftsmanship in naturally expressed materials, and this preference is evident here.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates N/A Builder/Architect N/A

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

West Franklin Street's 400 block retains one of downtown Richmond's best-preserved clusters of turn-of-the-century upper-class townhouses, having as its focal point the architecturally luxuriant Commonwealth Club, designed in the 1890's by Carrere and Hastings of New York. Although the block was once part of an unbroken progression of fine residences extending from Capitol Square to Monument Avenue, it is now a detached enclave being hemmed in by modern high-rise buildings. As such it stands out as a lively contrast to the austere modernity of its neighbors and preserves a historic perspective for what was once Richmond's most fashionable street. The stylistic diversity of the turn of the century is well illustrated here with houses in the Italianate, Romanesque, Colonial Revival, and Classical styles; despite the intrusion of an architecturally undistinguished Art Deco apartment house, the block maintains a consistency of scale and materials, making its visual unity an important design resource for the city.

### Historical Background

The 400 block of West Franklin Street is part of an area first developed by Thomas Rutherford between 1803 and 1816. Rutherford's addition became a part of the city of Richmond in 1810, and the original development consisted of a series of villa-type houses located on large lots. Early insurance policies indicate that these first houses had extensive outbuildings and gardens on their lots. The westernmost of these was a residence erected in 1824 by Payton Drew on what later became the site of the Commonwealth Club. Because the block was then on the western edge of the city limits, far from urban activity, little additional development occurred until mid-century.

Richmond expanded in population throughout the later 19th century, and the 400 block lay in the path of development. By 1900, the block had lost its country aspect, being transformed as an urban neighborhood. The character of the street as a stylish residential district was reinforced in the 1890's when the Commonwealth Club located here. The Commonwealth Club immediately became the city's most prestigious and influential. Clubs had previously located in former residences, and the Commonwealth was the first to locate in a structure erected especially for this purpose. While the building has been greatly expanded over the years, the original portion remains intact.

The Commonwealth Club was established in 1890 and moved into this building in 1892. They merged with the Richmond Club, the oldest in the city, and were to merge in 1937 with the Westmoreland Club, which had been established in 1877. The Commonwealth Club has continued to thrive and remains a popular location for many social events.

Unlike other blocks on Franklin to the east such as the 00 block East and the 200 block West, all of the pre-Civil War houses have disappeared, and the 400 block now preserves the appearance of the late 19th century. The houses on this block are all three stories high with vertical proportions, and most contain bays or turrets which serve to further emphasize the verticality of the composition. Since the houses share the same cornice heights, they form a consistent facade for the street.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Scott, Mary Wingfield Old Richmond Neighborhoods Richmond, 1950.

Richmond City Directories, 1879-1901.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 3 acres

Quadrangle name Richmond, VA

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 18 283740 4158080  
Zone Easting Northing

B           
Zone Easting Northing

C         

D         

E         

F         

G         

H         

**Verbal boundary description and justification** Beginning at a point on the NW side of Monroe St. at the intersection with the SW side of the alley between W. Grace and W. Franklin sts.; thence extending SW along NW side of Monroe to SW corner of intersection with W. Franklin; thence SE across Monroe and along SW side of W. Franklin to SE property line of 319 W. Franklin;

**List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries** (See Continuation Sheet #5 )

state N/A code county N/A code

state N/A code county N/A code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Robert P. Winthrop

organization Robert Winthrop Architect date November 2, 1982

street & number 417 North Boulevard telephone (804) 353-8828

city or town Richmond, state Virginia

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

   national    X state    local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature H. Bryan Mitchell

H. Bryan Mitchell, Executive Director  
title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission date OCT 19 1982

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

THE COMMONWEALTH CLUB HISTORIC DISTRICT, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

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Continuation sheet #3

Item number 7

Page 1

7. DESCRIPTION -- Detailed Description (continued)

The interiors of two of the houses at 404 and 406 West Franklin Street have recently been restored. They contain parquet floors, wood wainscots, molded plaster ceilings, and imaginatively designed mantels. The most important features of both interiors is the imaginatively designed stairways. These are inventive designs of considerable complexity.

INVENTORY:

Individual Buildings

(Of the fourteen structures in this district, none is non-contributing)

South Side

319-321 West Franklin Street, 1885

1 This two-story brick double house is crowned with a one-story mansard. It is treated as symmetrical composition with a three-story central pavilion with an unusual double curved roof line flanked by identical wings. The large dormers are not identical and are fanciful compositions of curved decorative elements. The roof, now painted, contains elaborate patterns in slate. The house has a fine cast-iron fence.

401 West Franklin Street - The Commonwealth Club, 1891,  
Carrere & Hastings Architects

2 The beautifully designed home of Richmond's most prestigious club is an early example of the Colonial Revival. The original building is brick, terra cotta, and brownstone and has a slate roof. A central gabled bay contains the entrance. A recessed entrance is framed with a brownstone Palladian arch. On the second floor of the entrance bay is a triple arcade framing a recessed porch. The bay is flanked by two almost identical bays forming a symmetrical composition. The roof line is dramatically asymmetrical with a steep hipped roof to the western side of the facade and a circular pyramidal roof to the east. This roof covers a curved bay in the middle of the east elevation. The curved bay is surrounded by a polygonal two-level porch. The porch is made up of brick arches on the lower level and a colonnade of triple Tuscan columns on the second floor.

The Commonwealth Club's composition of symmetrical and asymmetrical elements closely juxtaposed is imaginative and unusual. The main rooms of the original section of the Club remain unchanged in arrangement and volume. They have no traces of the original decoration. The Club was greatly expanded throughout the 20th century.

413 West Franklin Street, c. 1928; Carl Lindner Architect

3 This three-story brick apartment house was erected in the garden of the house at 415 West Franklin. The undistinguished Art Deco design ambiguously combines Modernist and Georgian design elements. The utilitarian side elevation is without architectural merit. A common type of speculative apartment house of the late 1920's, the ordinary craftsmanship and design of the building are unrelated to the fine buildings elsewhere in the block.

415 West Franklin Street, c. 1886

4 This three-bay, three-story house has lost its cornice but is otherwise well preserved. The first-floor windows open on a fine cast-iron balcony. The entrance has lost its bracketed shelter.

(See Continuation Sheet #4)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

THE COMMONWEALTH CLUB HISTORIC DISTRICT, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

Continuation sheet #4

Item number 7

Page 2

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7. DESCRIPTION -- Inventory (continued)  
400-402 West Franklin Street

5 The Italianate home, c.1870, on this property was demolished in c1974. The property is now used as a parking lot. The cast-iron fence of this house remains.

404 West Franklin Street, c. 1998

6 A fine three-story house in the Romanesque style dating from the turn-of-the century, the brownstone and brick facade is distinguished by sculpted panels and gable as well as stained-glass window transoms. The semi-circular bay on the east was one of the most popular residential features in Richmond at this time, and this houses's bay is unusually large and spacious. It was built for Mr. Croydon H. Sutton, who was in real estate. The interior is handsome and the mantels, which feature carved griffins, are spectacular.

406 West Franklin Street, 1899

1 This three-story brick Renaissance Revival house was recently restored after a long period of neglect. The porch is the only major element not replaced although the terra-cotta balustrade remains. White brick and gold terra cotta are an unusual choice of materials, but they are architecturally effective here. The delicate Classical moldings are well rendered in terra cotta. This is the only occurrence of this color scheme in Richmond. The elegant interior is also well preserved. The facade is composed as two bays, the eastern of which is curved. The composition is strongly asymmetrical.

408-410 West Franklin Street, c. 1903

8 A large three-story brick Romanesque double house, the architectural treatment is more typical of that of other Richmond townhouses of its period than the more elaborate houses to the east. Brownstone trim and a slate mansard roof were typical of the period. The stained-glass window transoms on the first floor testify to the status of the original occupants. This is one of the few houses on this part of Franklin Street not to have been restored.

412 West Franklin Street, c. 1880.

9 Brownstone and brick, this Romanesque three-level house illustrates both the simplicity and the solidity valued by the Richardson Romanesque. The original porch survives. This house was renovated in 1981.

414 West Franklin Street, c. 1875-78

10 This two-story Italianate house has been renovated. White it has lost its porch, it retains its architectural character. A small Italianate townhouse, it is more charming than the larger three-story Italianate houses once typical of downtown Richmond. The house is now used as doctors' offices.

416 West Franklin Street, 1880

11 Elaborate patterns of molded brick enliven the front of this fine three-story residence. The composition of the shallow curved bay surmounted by an arch in a gable is particularly fine.

(See Continuation Sheet # 5)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

THE COMMONWEALTH CLUB HISTORIC DISTRICT, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet #6 2

item number 7, 8

Page 3, 1

7. DESCRIPTION -- Inventory (continued)

To the north, the brick-walled garden and carriage house remain to make this one of the best-preserved houses on the street.

500 West Franklin Street, 1882

12 Three stories tall and a bit gaunt, this modified Gothic house was first occupied by Adolph Osterloh, the Austro-Hungarian Consul in Richmond, and the residence has a slightly official air. The fine brickwork and granite trim are particularly fine.

Recently restored, the cast-iron balcony, fence, and cresting are all intact, as is the garden; the very large two-story carriage house needs to be further repaired.

The combination of slightly Gothic arches on the first floor and slightly Classical pediment on the second floor is unusual.

8. Significance -- Historical Background

The residents of the block, like other parts of Franklin Street, were prominent leaders of Richmond businesses. William Parrish, the Treasurer of the Richmond Cedar Works, lived at 406 West Franklin Street; the Treasurer of the RF&P Railroad lived at 412; and Adolph Osterloh the Austro-Hungarian Consul in Richmond, lived at 500 West Franklin Street.

The block was fully developed by 1900, but as Richmond continued to grow the central residential areas increased in density. In 1927, several houses on the south side of the street were pulled down and replaced by an apartment house designed by Richmond architect Carl Lindner. While it was in the modernist Art Deco style, the building was carefully designed, and the materials and colors matched those of the existing houses in the block.

The most dramatic change in the architectural character of the street took place in the 1960's and '70's, when a series of high-rise apartments and hotels were built, destroying entire blocks of 19th-century houses. The design of the new high-rises was entirely unrelated to the character of the street, and the 300 and 500 blocks were both transformed by modern buildings.

The only recent loss on the 400 block was the demolition of the house on the corner of Madison and Franklin streets to make a parking lot for a hospital which was to move from the area several years later. Now surrounded by high-rise apartments and hotels, the fine detail and intimate scale of this block are notable, and the block is an important link connecting central Richmond with the residential areas to the west.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

THE COMMONWEALTH CLUB HISTORIC CLUB, RICHMOND, VA

Continuation sheet # 5

Item number 10

Page 1

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA -- Verbal Boundary Description and Justification

thence SW along said line to NE side of alley between W. Franklin and W. Main sts.;  
thence NW along said side to the NW side of Monroe; thence about 90' SW, then about 65'  
NW, then about 50' NE, then about 55' NW, then about 60' NE, all encompassing the  
Commonwealth Club; thence about 135' NW, along rear property lines of 413-415 W. Franklin  
to SE side of Henry St.; thence NE along said side to NE corner of W. Franklin and Henry  
sts.; thence NW along NE side of W. Franklin to NW property line of 500 W. Franklin;  
thence NE along said line to SW side of alley between W. Grace and W. Franklin sts.;  
thence SE along said side, crossing Henry and continuing along said side of alley to  
point of origin.

Justification: The boundary has been drawn to encompass the 400 block of W. Franklin St.  
and 319-321 and 500 W. Franklin, which survive from the immediate turn-of-the-century  
neighborhood, and to exclude the modern high-rise apartments and hotels which frame the  
district.



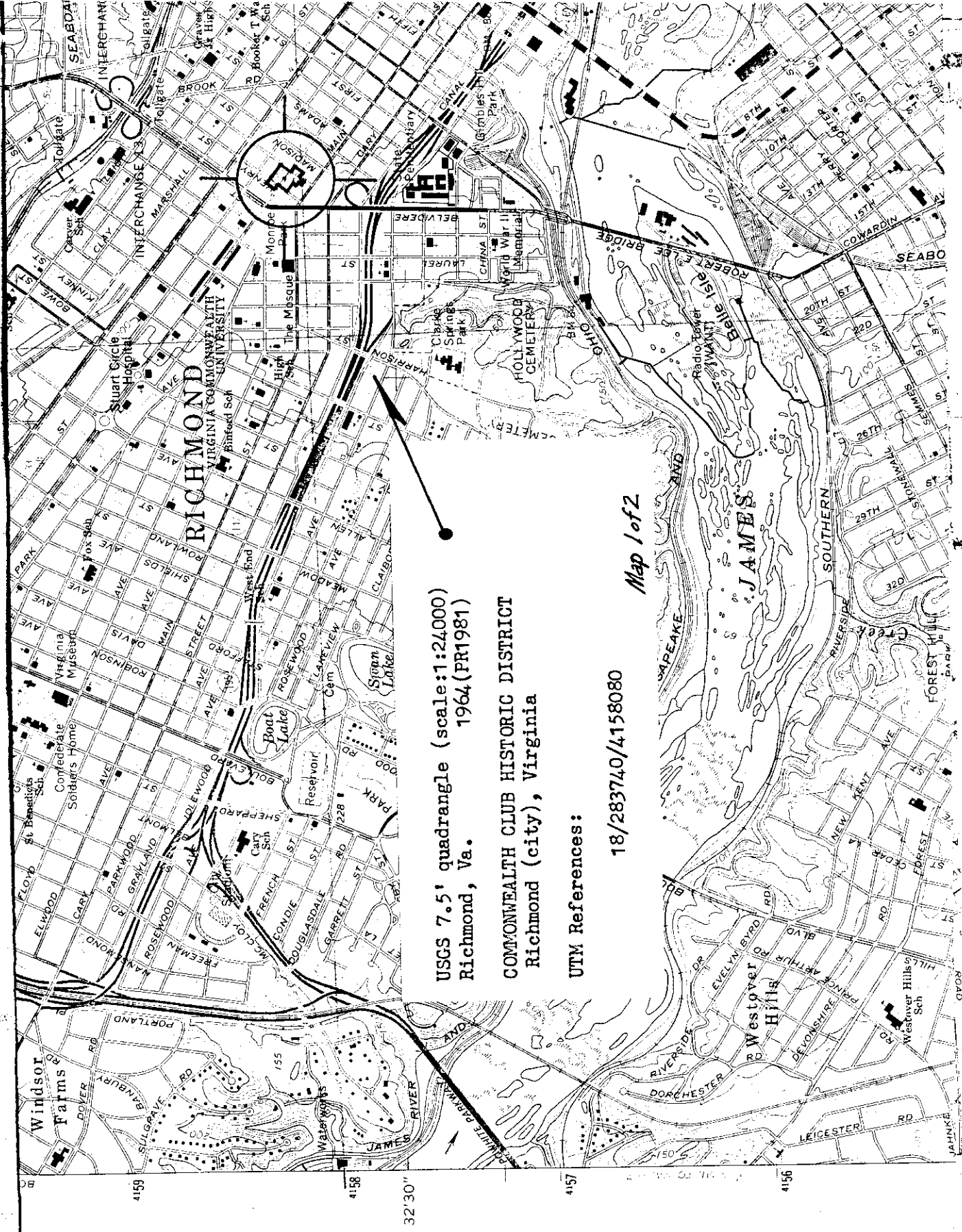
USGS 7.5' quadrangle (scale:1:24,000)  
1964 (PR1981)  
Richmond, Va.

COMMONWEALTH CLUB HISTORIC DISTRICT  
Richmond (city), Virginia

UTM References:

18/283740/4158080

Map 1 of 2



**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

THE COMMONWEALTH CLUB HISTORIC DISTRICT, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

Continuation sheet #1

Item number 4

Page 1

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**4. OWNERS OF PROPERTY**

- 401 West Franklin Street - The Commonwealth Club  
c/o Mr. Stuart G. Christian, Jr., President  
401 West Franklin Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23220
- 411-413 West Franklin Street - The Henry-Franklin Corporation  
c/o Thomas L. Newton  
1400 Ross Building  
Richmond, Virginia 23219
- 415 West Franklin Street - Virginia Premium Finance  
c/o Mr. Alfred T. Curlee  
415 West Franklin Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23220
- 400 West Franklin Street - W.W. and Patricia Y. Siebert  
c/o Communication Corporation of Virginia  
8001 Franklin Farms Drive, Room 217  
Richmond, Virginia 23229
- 402 West Franklin Street - Amphill Associates  
c/o Mr. Bowlman T. Bowles, Jr., General Partner  
P.O. Box 392  
Richmond, Virginia 23203
- 404 West Franklin Street - Amphill Associates  
c/o Mr. Bowlman T. Bowles, Jr., General Partner  
P.O. Box 392  
Richmond, Virginia 23203
- 406 West Franklin Street - W.W. and Patricia Y. Siebert  
c/o Communication Corporation of Virginia  
8001 Franklin Farms Drive, Room 217  
Richmond, Virginia 23229
- 408-410 West Franklin Street - Mortgage Services, Inc.  
c/o Mr. Charles B. Bice, President  
629 East Main Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219
- 412 West Franklin Street - Hamilton Investment Services  
c/o Ms. Ann Healy, General Partner  
P.O. Box 80  
Richmond, Virginia 23201
- 414 West Franklin Street - Merritt W. Foster, Jr. and R. Finley Gayle  
Oxford Circle West  
Richmond, Virginia 23221

(See Continuation #2)

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

THE COMMONWEALTH CLUB HISTORIC DISTRICT, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

Continuation sheet #2

Item number 4

Page 2

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received  
date entered

4. OWNERS OF PROPERTIES (continued)

- 416 West Franklin Street - Helen P. Williams  
416 West Franklin Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23220
- 500 West Franklin Street - L. Harvey Poe, Jr.  
1701 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20006